Isomac
Relax Automatica

A Closer Look

Overview

The Relax arrives well packed. Is very well built with high quality (industry standard) components and it is clear that a lot of care has been taken with assembly. Constructed using heavy gauge mirror finish stainless steel the Relax has clean modern lines and has a quality modern look

This type of machine internally, is slightly more complex than the cheaper single boiler non Heat Exchanger (HX) machines. There are fewer controls and no need to do anything special (apart from filling the water tank occasionally) to draw steam, hot water or espresso at any time. The Relax automatically maintains the water level in the boiler as required and if run low on water in the tank the Relax switches itself off as a safety precaution.

The Relax is quiet in operation, but did have a small rattle from the internal plastic water tank against the metal plate of the carrier (easily fixed with a little foam tape). The warmer tray is very large indeed and has a capacity ideally suited to a small office environment. The machine is on the tall side, but there is still reasonable access under normal kitchen wall cupboards.

The Barista kit that is supplied free with the machine is good quality with all the essential items required to make great coffee and is usually an extra expense when buying an espresso machine.

This is a machine that I didn't expect to like at all. Now I have had the chance of reviewing one, I am surprised at how capable the machine is. Personally, I think this is actually a much better machine at doing its job (making coffee), than other more expensive Isomac machines!

The Relax is a machine near the top of the Isomac range but has a performance at least as good, if not better than the flagship Millennium. Many people will not choose the Relax, because it doesn't have a full E61 group, but in the case of the Relax, this actually improves its ability to make great coffee**. In addition if you have small children, there is no exposed very hot E61 group to burn them, so it's a lot safer.**

The electronic touch-pad makes it really easy to operate in daily use, so it's absolutely ideal for a small office environment. This in no way however makes it unsuitable for the "expert" home user, as the buttons are easily user programmable (for dose) and for those who want the absolute in control, you can "pull your shot" manually, but pressing a button instead of lifting a lever.

A minor concern was the longevity of the touch-pad (it seems quite durable), but after a look inside, replacement would be a quick and easy job.

My wife said one thing I found particularly interesting

Her comment **"even I can make coffee with this!"**

In summary; The Relax is an absolute gem of a machine! It's very easy to use and easy for the reseller to support. It will provide years of reliable service with the minimum of maintenance.

Only one serious problem…. I have to return it today!

How it arrived and unpacking

Very sturdy box, no room on the inside to pack the basic free barista kit that will come with the machine. It is not easy to get the machine out of the box as there is limited room at the sides to reach down and get a good grip. Most customers are likely to grip at the back of the machine and on the panel holding the group (but not the group itself!) as shown.

The Relax comes with a manufacturer's manual that is of the usual poor standard common with these machines (in fact mine came for the wrong model of relax and also was for the old version!). It only covers the basics of machine operation and a very brief description of how to make coffee. The UK Bella Barista guide will prove to be of significant help to the novice user.

The corner positioning of Relax is ideal, especially when located near a sink. Once in position on the counter the machine looks nice and does not dominate on standard sized work surface, but does look bulkier than the Vivi. It is a tallish machine but gives enough room under standard height kitchen cupboards for cups etc. Refilling the water tank can be done with a standard plastic cook's jug, without having to pull the machine from under the cupboards. It does have clean lines and the lack of a HOT exposed group is a bonus if you have children.

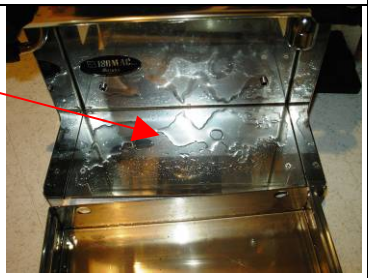
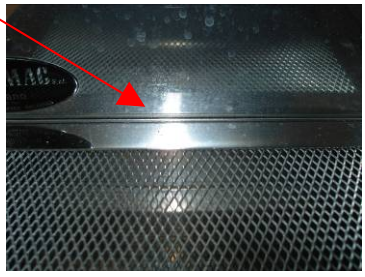
Inside the Relax

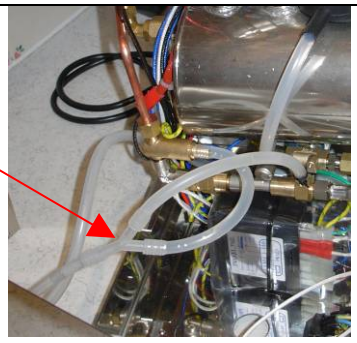
Internal build quality is good with very high quality components. Components are well positioned, neatly assembled.

In the event of any high pressure venting the Relax does have a nice feature where the high pressure vent is surrounded by a protective channel or gutter that routes the water down into the drip tray via a pipe.

Servicing this machine will be very easy; strip down is fast and simple with little potential for error. Component quality is (as you would expect very high), and the design excellent with easy access to internal components. The case is difficult to remove for the inexperienced home user and I would not recommend attempting this, as damage to the machine could result.

Key features

Item/Description	Picture	Comments
Don't like cheaper puffy plastic label		The metal ones that these (I understand) replace were excellent, heavy, solid and gave an impression of quality. These no doubt have a peel off backing and simply stick on, I am sure many will end up falling off with time, especially with the positioning by the drip tray and steam wand!
Drip tray could be better designed, because the grouphead is positioned towards the rear of the cup rack and drip tray a little water can get behind there unless you're careful. I also think a very small amount might dribble down behind from the pressure release vent	 	I think that there needs to be a small design change whenever they next review the design of the Relax to prevent this from happening. It is a minor irritation, and not much liquid gets there, the amount shown is after half a day. A quick wipe and it's gone.
Boiler is smaller (looks about 1.2l compared to the Vivi's 1.5l, so takes longer to recover and not the sheer capacity, stability of the Vivi		I think the boiler is on the smallish side for a HX machine. Isomac would do well to source a larger boiler if ever they revise the design internally.

The review Relax was running at average of 1.3 bar. I actually liked the pressure gauge, large clear easy to read and looked nice quality. Certainly thought it was nicer looking than the one on the Millennium!		User guide doesn't state what the correct pressure should be, no green ready zone markings on the gauge. I think 1.3 bar average pressure is fine & recommend that any Isomac checked should be adjusted if below 1.2 bar
Moderate steamer compared to Vivi and Zaffiro.		Fine for domestic use, not really suitable for light commercial use
Steam wand is on the short side A user with a really big and tall milk jug may have difficulty. All my milk jugs worked ok though!		This wand is possibly on the short side, because they didn't use a ball fitting, another area to consider if they ever redesign.
Rattles from the Water tank area. The plastic tank rattles against the steel plating		Need to place 2 plastic or silicon "dots" on the steel either side in the water tank enclosure (at the top) to stop rattles and maybe on the outer case at the back as well.
Plastic Y connectors		I don't know why these are always fitted. Brass would be far better.
Plastic clip on steam wand is not an improvement		They slide about look cheap and feel bad. The normal rubber type grips found on other coffee machines actually feel and work better than these

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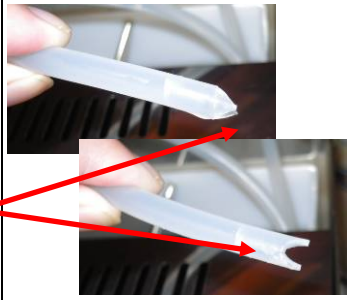
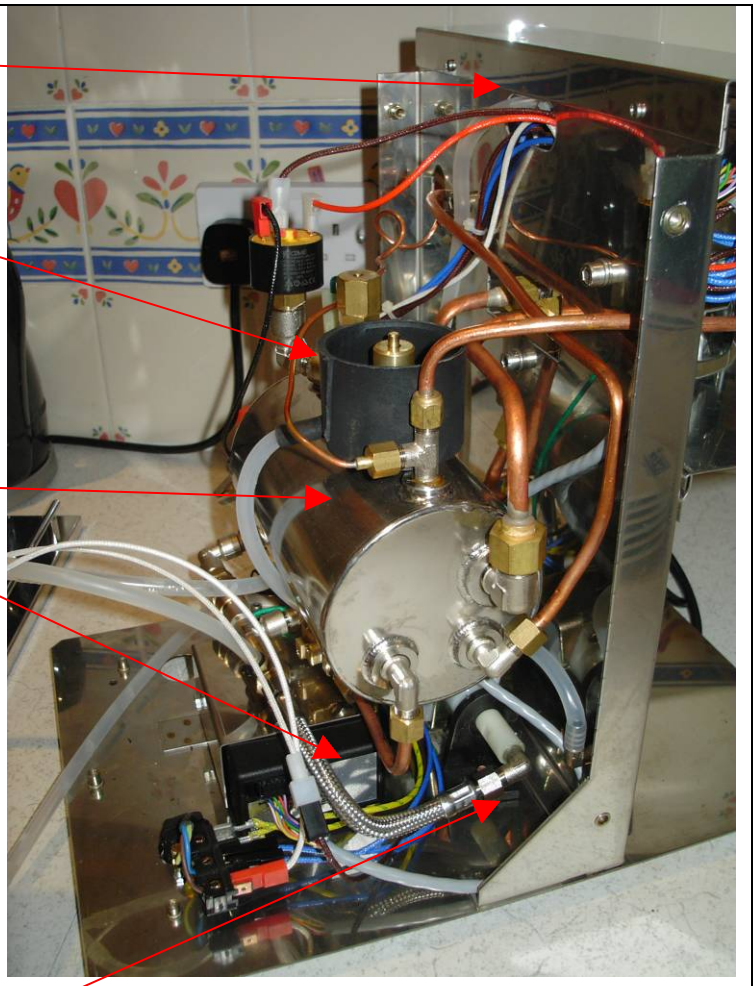
The water feed tubes are quite long and have square cut ends. While the in-line water filter is on, there is not a problem. When it was removed (as it will be when exhausted or 1 month old) I had 2 occasions where the tube “sucked” onto the bottom of the tank in my Zaffiro and obstructed the flow of water to the pump. I have since “cut” my tube and I include a recommendation in the user guide.		Isomac should modify these tubes at the factory. They do make a small standoff strainer to fit on the bottom of the feed tube if your machine comes with this accessory , cutting the tube is not necessary
When low on water machine just switches off.		Isomac should fit a warning bleeper like the Vivi which starts beeping even though the machine switches off. Low water switch off level set conservatively (although personally I don’t mind this I know customers find this irritating)
I hate it when the espresso shot just stops.		Second Micro switch to illuminate a low water buzzer or light a few oz before the machine will switch off due to low water level. Or a dual pole/position micro switch to replace existing one
Water Tap works well, but positioning could be better		It’s not over grille on cup tray, so liquid spilt does not go in drip tray or in hole, but falls on steel.

Nice quality steel case, Steel frame substantial and high quality Wiring all braided and high quality Liked the way the control board was protected with metal cover Liked the drainage system around the pressure vent valve, a thoughtful touch, and will certainly reduce the chance of water damage All components very accessible. This makes servicing quick and easy (once the case is off) Very nicely made stainless steel boiler Steel braided high pressure pipe		
Pump replacement will be moderately difficult as there's not much room under there, requiring only the removal of 2 screws holding the pump. Then the usual removal of wiring and tubes		Experienced technician approx 45-60m
Portafilters coming ready assembled and spouts in the right place		How do they always get the spouts in the right place?
The free water filter supplied with each machine		**Nice touch**
Electronic dosing worked very well indeed. **Because I didn't realise there wasn't a way to reset the machine to original factory settings, I didn't time each button with no portafilter loaded before reprogramming. This would have given me engineering guide timings to return a machine to factory settings. You might want to do this if you buy one, and after you reprogram**		A "return to factory settings option would be useful

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Huge cup warming tray. So as to not scratch the tray, I of course removed these cups after the photograph! ***I don't have any Isomac cups, but must find out if they make them!***		A piece of perforated non-slip matting works perfectly to stop the tray getting scratched. I would like to see the manufacturers supply something made for the machine

I liked the fact that it didn't have an e61 group (the portafilter holders and baskets are standard E61 type though). Let's clarify this, I like the e61 group, but unfortunately the average implementation of the group on domestic HX systems does give a brew temperature towards the top end of the ideal range. The Relax on the other hand seems to maintain the shot temperature at 92-93c (max 94) as long as a proper cooling flush is done. This is around the middle of the ideal range.

I think the group on the Relax is better suited to the particular HX implementation on the Isomac machines. Certainly In my opinion, better and more reliable espresso was produced. In fairness though, we are talking about nuances of taste, which would generally not be obvious and would depend greatly on the bean in use!

The difficulty will probably be convincing the "prosumer" expert buyer that this machine actually performs at least as well or better because it doesn't have the full "revered" E61 group!

The pre-programmed function is great, because it teaches you to adjust with grind and not cheat with time. Also your hands are free to do what an HX machine is really good at, steaming at the same time as your pouring your espresso, without worrying about the lever.

It's just nice to simply press a button and get this every time!

About 13 mm or more of crema, using a SINGLE portafilter basket **(not overdosed)**

The 6th in a series of "god shots" from the relax Automatica

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Pressurestat Adjustment

The Relax runs hot, but this is usual with HX machines, which are a tight compromise between continuously available steam, and production of brew water for espresso. The boilers are running at some 125c so the group gets much hotter than on a single boiler machine running at around 98-102c (because there is some pressure in the boiler of these machines).

Most manufacturers feed the grouphead thermosyphon from the heat exchanger and take no special measures to ensure that the group does not get too hot. The group on the Relax seems better suited to the HX system used by Isomac than the usual E61 group.

A cooling flush is required, prior to drawing espresso.

This actually works in 2 ways.

1. The water flashing off to steam from the group removes some heat from the group (evaporation).
2. The main benefit is to remove the water than has been sitting in the heat exchanger (as it will be at around 125-128c)

The fresh water that would come through the HX after the cooling flush is heated by the HX in the boiler and probably further heated by the group.

The Relax required a normal 3-4oz cooling cooling flush ***when running at 1.3bar (internal water temp of approx 125c).***

Final views on Pressure settings

As always a compromise, but the 1.3 bar pressure is probably optimum for the machine, any higher and brew water temperature will be too high. I measured it at 92-93 after a cooling flush, which is quite good being in the middle of the optimum range. Steam performance is moderate, but is sufficient for domestic use.

Raising the pressure will result in brew water temperature problems, larger cooling flushes and I suspect, won't make much difference to steam performance.

Lowering the temp may reduce brew water temperature, but with the moderate steaming performance I wouldn't recommend it.

Please note that your machine will be thoroughly inspected by Bella Barista prior to delivery and they will already have ensured that the machine is operating correctly and boiler pressure adjusted if necessary.

Pressure adjustment can be done by the home user on some machines, but we recommend not attempting this on a Millennium. Please give us a call first as it may be unnecessary.

Damage as result of incorrect adjustment will not be covered under warranty (please note correct temperature measurement of brew water is a skilled task, requiring experience and the correct equipment)

Outer Case Removal

This is moderately time consuming because there are 11 screws holding the case. 3 on each side, 1 at the back underneath, the 2 screws for the front feet and the 2 screws holding the panel that carries the cold water tank (accessed from under the cup warmer tray). These all hold the outer case on

The job is a bit of a pain, because you do need to put the machine on its side to get the case off, with the risk of scratches.

Best order of removal (reverse to reassemble)

1. **Place on side remove screw at back underneath**
2. **Remove front feet**
3. **Remove 2 screws under cup warmer tray**
4. **Place upright remove remaining 6 side panel screws (support case if needed)**
5. **remove outer case**

Please note: I have included this mainly to show you that it's not easy to remove the outer case. You may read well meaning advice on the internet about adjusting something within the machine, necessitating case removal.

Don't do it

Your machine will be thoroughly inspected by Bella Barista prior to delivery they will already have ensured that the machine is operating correctly and you should have no need to remove it.

Final Thoughts

It is one of Isomac's "top of the range" machines and as such carries a unique pedigree. The Relax is a great machine, no doubt about it. It's not a cheap machine, but it is good. At this level the look of the machine and "brand" name is as important as the quality. **Many people will not choose this machine, because it doesn't have a full E61 group. This is a great shame, because some people actually pass by a machine that may be much better suited to their needs than the usual E61 choices!**

My closer look picked up things I would like to see improved, but be assured this is an excellent quality machine that will provide years of reliable service and last a lifetime (if well maintained and carefully used). The quality of the internal components and the steel is top class and it has clean looks and great performance

Espresso

As long as a cooling flush is performed, the Relax makes consistently good espressos and easily maintains the temperature during the pour. Domestic volumes of espresso one after another will be absolutely no problem with this machine.

Steam Production

The Relax is a moderate steamer. The steam wand is shorter than usual and the 2 holes are not too large. The milk swirls easily and the moderate steam performance actually helps with getting good quantities of microfoam before the milk overheats. You will have no problems producing copious amounts of microfoam at your first attempt.

Please note that although it is moderate strength steamer, it will produce almost limitless amounts of steam and wont "run out of puff"

Hot Water

It's nice to have plenty of really hot water on tap. The internal boiler has plenty of water available. Recovery time after drawing water is good. Drawing water for an Americano, the system recovers within 60 seconds.

Although is doesn't have a full E61 group head many parts are still industry standard (as are many of the components in the machine), so parts such as, pumps, gaskets, filter holders, filter holder handles etc. are all a standard size and readily available from multiple suppliers. This also means that the pricing of these spares is highly competitive.